The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides nearly $800 billion to stimulate the economy. The legislation includes $1.5 billion for homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) at HUD. It will provide assistance to homeless or at-risk families, individuals, and youth. This funding will be distributed quickly, and so communities should begin preparing immediately. Information, including allocations and guidelines, is available at HUD's Homelessness Resource Exchange website: http://www.hudhre.info. Plans for funding are due to HUD by May 18. Subcontracts with providers must be signed by September 30. Grantees will have to spend 60 percent of the funds within 2 years of obligation from HUD and 100 percent within 3 years.

The program provides a tremendous opportunity to help prevent a surge of homelessness from the economic crisis and to make lasting improvements to homelessness assistance systems. Planning and implementing a homelessness prevention and re-housing program requires excellent coordination, partnerships, and leadership, and even if a community already has similar services, new partnerships might still need to be forged to most efficiently and effectively use these new funds. Communities might think of the work ahead as happening in two phases:

- Planning and program design (including submission of the required action plan to HUD);

- Implementation, oversight, and ongoing evaluation and modification of the program.

Planning and Program Design

Creating a vision. Despite the short timeframe in which to develop this program, developing a clear vision will help communities structure their programs efficiently and help identify the key partners. The funding presents a tremendous opportunity to transform the homelessness assistance system in the community from one focused on crisis and emergency assistance (with shelter being the center of service delivery) to one in which housing stability and rapid re-housing are the focus. A common vision for what the community wants this program to accomplish will help focus attention on its goals, its strategies, and therefore on which agencies in the community are the best fit for the various necessary components within the program design.

Identifying partners for planning. Depending on the community, the HPRP funds will go to city, county, or state governments (in some case two or all three), but how the funds will actually be spent (i.e., direct housing financial assistance, support services, program administration) is likely to be left largely to the discretion of the jurisdictions. In many cases, the HPRP recipient might best simply act as a pass-through entity. Therefore, the initial planning stages should include the government recipient, as well as several other partners.

- City, county, and state economic assistance and human services staff currently implementing the same or similar programming.

- Nonprofit and community-based organizations currently taking the lead on administering homelessness prevention and/or re-housing programs, including:
    - Those providing short-term financial assistance related to stabilizing housing for those at risk of homelessness;
    - Those administering short- to medium-term rental assistance for formerly homeless persons;
    - Those providing case management and support services related to housing stability for formerly homeless persons and persons at risk of homelessness; and
    - Those already providing housing location assistance and landlord mediation for formerly homeless persons and persons at risk of homelessness.
- If there are advisory boards such as the a Continuum of Care body, a local Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH), or some other oversight committee (such as 10-year Plan governance body), these partners should be included in the planning since they will have in-depth understanding of how people fall into homelessness in the community and what resources already exist to prevent or alleviate homelessness.
- Consumer advocates: those people in the community experiencing homelessness and those who have previously experienced homelessness should be integrally involved throughout planning and implementation, as they have the most relevant personal experience and can share insights into which services are effective and which are not.

Other questions to consider that will help you identify important partners:

- What are the step-by-step processes by which a family, individual, or youth will access the program (from both prevention and re-housing perspectives) *or* be targeted and reached by the program staff?
- What are the likely entities to administer financial assistance, short- and medium-term rental assistance, housing search and placement, and case management? How will these entities complement one another's efforts?
- Will resources be pooled, leveraging the impact of already existing services (always a good idea, if possible)?
- Will resources also be coordinated and targeted to implement discharge planning and re-entry efforts with local institutions, including jails, prisons, juvenile justice, mental health facilities, chemical dependency treatment centers, etc.?
- What can the community do to achieve consistency across the services that clients receive? (Consider shelter and outreach staff in this part of the planning process.)
- Even if less centralized, the prevention component of the program will be more effective if it is well coordinated and consistent across areas, and so what oversight and implementation structure will ensure this? (Consider partners in prevention, including emergency assistance, legal aid, and appropriate home-based case management.)

Resource directories already available in communities might be useful in putting together the pieces of this program puzzle – by service area, and then, more specifically, by potential agencies, especially when the resource directory clearly illustrates areas of agency expertise.

Preliminary planning and discussion might also include leading homelessness advocates in the community, as well as people familiar with evaluation principles and program design, including the local homeless management information system (HMIS) administrator.

Although communities will want to avoid unnecessary process-for-the-sake-of-process activities, the planning and program design phase of this process should be both transparent and goal-focused. As long as the design is fundamentally sound, there will be time to adapt the model over the course of the next two years.

Assess community needs. Although there is little time to go through elaborate planning and development activities, the lead planners should nonetheless be able to perform a short needs assessment of the community to determine who will be served by the program and establish eligibility criteria. It could include such factors as: extremely low income (ELI; i.e., less than 30% of area median income), housing-burdened (i.e., low-income renters spending more than 50% of income on housing costs), currently or previously homeless, and other factors associated with high likelihood of becoming homeless.

Implementation, Oversight, and Ongoing Evaluation and Modification

Once communities have written and submitted their action plans and the plans have been accepted by HUD, communities will quickly begin implementation of their programs. Despite the short timeframe, communities may issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to contract the program activities out to the most appropriate organizations in the community. Public and private partners will include those listed in the planning phase of delivery (the previous section of this paper), but additional partners can be helpful in meeting the practical challenges of implementing the program.

Reaching out to people at risk of homelessness. Most communities will try to target resources to those who are most likely to become homeless or remain homeless without the help. Those individuals and families are sometimes not the ones most likely to seek out homelessness prevention services. To identify those clients, and to leverage additional expertise and services, an HPRP-funded prevention program can partner with a range of agencies that are already working with them, including:
- Schools and homeless school liaisons;
- Workforce centers;
- TANF employment counselors (welfare to work programs);
- Property managers, landlord groups, and tenants' associations;
- Housing courts and legal aid agencies;
- County veterans' services offices and other veterans' services offices;
- Multifamily housing associations;
- Discharge planning departments at jails, prisons, and mental health, chemical dependency, and other institutions;

- Probation offices;

- Domestic violence service providers;

- Food shelves and soup kitchens;

- The faith community;

- Housing authorities;

- Family support centers;

- Police;

- Child welfare agencies;

- Head Start and Early Head Start; and

- Consumer advocates (those experiencing homelessness and those who have previously experienced homelessness).

Link people with services to address their other needs. In addition, close connections will need to be formed with local human service providers to ensure mainstream services connections and stabilize living situations in the longer run. Communication across these agencies will be critical throughout implementation.

Links to Employment. Particularly as HPRP is a short–term program, it is critical that partners coordinate well with employment programs in the community. Implementation plans should include connections with providers of job-skills training, employment counseling, workforce development centers, job placement services, and related disability services.

Families with children.   Up to $5 billion is available to states under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 for the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund, which makes coordination with TANF agencies vital in maximizing impact and efficiency of both programs. As maximum rent assistance under the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund is capped at four months, TANF agencies will need to make referrals to HPRP programs where longer-term assistance is needed. For more information on the TANF Fund, see: http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/2200.

Get feedback. Several communities already administering homelessness prevention and re-housing programs emphasize the need for strong leadership along with the opportunity for ongoing input from the community. This means that those administering the services and assistance must have a process to receive feedback, but they must also have the ability to deliver the services unfettered by too much bureaucracy. This is a balance that some communities strike by the use of a community advisory committee (this could be an already existing body). Some use the committee structure already in place to implement their 10-year plans, and as long as the breadth of representation is sufficient, this may work for this program. Among those that should likely be represented on such a committee (including others mentioned previously): staff from shelters, youth-serving agencies, homeless and formerly homeless persons; and housing providers and local landlords.

Measure Outcomes. HUD's guidelines include requirements for data collection and evaluation, which will help to further inform oversight and program management. Leadership overseeing this program will need to work closely with those in the community who have experience incorporating program outcomes data into program

design and modification related to housing services and assistance; this would likely include the local HMIS administrator. Local partners will also need to have mechanisms in place to be able to provide more qualitative feedback throughout implementation. Some basic questions that the community should be asking throughout are:

- Is the program actually preventing homelessness (as opposed to just providing support for low-income individuals and families)?

- Is the community providing incentives to rapidly re-house those who become homeless (as opposed to expanding shelters' capacity)?

- Are there communication avenues in place to be able to share promising practices?

- Is there a formal feedback loop in place to be able to ensure that the program is nimble and responsive to quantitative and qualitative input?

- Are partners and program leaders working together to ensure that clients' housing stability outcomes remain the focus throughout?

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is developing additional information and helpful tools, which will be posted at the website below.

www.endhomelessness.org/section/prevention